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Minke Whale Hearing Project Placed on Hold in Norway

URE, NORWAY – During preparations for a multi-national project to test the hearing of minke whales (*Balaenoptera acutorostrata*) off the coast of Norway, severe weather with gale force winds and extreme tidal currents damaged the project testing site. The scientific team is deeply saddened to report that while assessing the storm damage, they discovered a single minke whale had become entangled and died in a barrier line that had broken free as a result of the severe weather conditions.

Dr. Petter Kvadsheim of the Norwegian Defence Research Establishment (FFI) said, “Key precautions and significant planning went into every aspect of the hearing test project. Our team was devastated when they realized a minke whale died in a barrier line damaged by the severe weather, prior to the official start of this year’s hearing test project.”

Dr. Dorian Houser of the National Marine Mammal Foundation (NMMF) added, “Our scientific team is heartbroken by this loss. Animal health and welfare is our highest priority, and we have placed the project on hold while a formal review is conducted.”

All protocols and procedures will be reviewed by the Norwegian permitting authorities, the NMMF Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee, and the US Navy Bureau of Medicine, in consultation with the agencies financially supporting the project. The project will remain on hold until the incident has been thoroughly reviewed. Whether the project will continue will be determined as part of the review process. In the meantime, the project testing site has been repaired to ensure its safety.

NMMF and FFI are leading an effort to acquire the first audiogram (hearing sensitivity curve) for a baleen whale. The effort is providing the first direct measures of hearing in any baleen whale and will be a step toward addressing a knowledge gap that is critical to protecting baleen whales from anthropogenic ocean noise. The research is funded by the Subcommittee on Ocean Science and Technology Interagency Task Force on Ocean Noise and Marine Life, which consists of multiple agencies including the Office of Naval Research, Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s National Marine Fisheries Service, US Navy Living Marine Resources, and the US Marine Mammal Commission.

The international scientific team remains committed to protecting minke whales and other baleen whales and managing the impact of ocean noise on these kinds of whales.

More about the testing project [can be found here.](#)

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